CHURCH ARCHITECTURE.

THE style of the middle ages was called Gothic, by way of opprobrium; but it might with great propriety be called Christian. It arose out of the demands of the Christian mode of worship. It fulfils all its requisites with grace and convenience.

"The spirit of the middle ages (observes Schlegel) has nowhere so powerfully expressed itself as in its architectural monuments. We still survey them with a mixed feeling of melancholy, delight, and wonder.

"Whoever were the inventors of this style were not mere heapers together of stones, but had all thoughts they meant to embody in their labours.

"All architecture is symbolical, but none so much so as the Christian architecture of the middle ages. The first and the greatest of its objects is to express the elevation of holy thoughts; the lofiness of meditation set free from earth, and proceeding unfettered to the heavens. It is this which stamps itself at once on the spirit of the beholder, however little he may himself be capable of analyzing his feelings when he gazes on these far-stretching columns and airy domes. But this is not all, —every part of the structure is as symbolical as the whole; and of this we can perceive many traces in all writings of the times. The altar is directed towards the rising of the sun; and the three great entrances are meant to express the conflux of worshippers from all the regions of the earth. The three towers express the Christian mystery of the Triune Godhead. The choir rises like a temple within a temple, with redoubled loftiness. The shape of the cross is in common with the Christian churches, even of the earlier times. The rose is the essential part of all the ornament of this architecture; even the shape of the windows, doors, and towers, may be traced to it, as well as all the accompanying decorations of flowers and leaves. When we view the whole structure, from the crypt to the choir, it is impossible to resist the idea of earthly death leading only to the fulness, the freedom, the solemn glories of eternity."

Such is the language of this eminent writer in illustrating the poetry of the middle ages by its architecture. And who can enter an ancient cathedral without being awe-struck by the magic of its construction, and the grand original effect of its harmonious design?

Architecture, more than any other art, depends on the influence of religion,—the temple being with many nations its only, and amongst all its highest, object. At the era alluded to, all the talent, all the science, and all the wealth of the country, were brought in aid of the perfection of the Christian temple, and the result has fully justified the efforts. The great impression which these churches, particularly their interiors, make upon the mind of every unprejudiced person, on that of the intelligent and well-informed, as well as the uncultivated and ignorant, is truly wonderful; they combine the simplicity and majesty of the groves of the forest with the richness and beauty of its flowers and leaves: all is variety, greatness, and sublimity. They fully justify the observation of Madame de Staël, that "architecture is the only art which approaches, in its effects, to the works of Nature." The reason of this is probably because, in its best examples, the means have been made so thoroughly subservient to the end. In every case where the style is perfect, that is, where the end in every thing and the means nothing, the impression of a work of art, whether of architecture, painting, or poetry, will be like that which Bouchardon said he felt from reading Homer:—"His whole frame appeared to himself to be enlarged,—all nature which surrounded him diminished to atoms."

The principle of the Greek temple is grandeur and dignity; faultless excellence was their object, as in all their arts, and was founded in the imitation of the natural world. They have never attempted the unattainable. The principle of Gothic architecture is altogether different; it calls upon the imagination of the spectator; the soul is agitated and impressed with the glimpse of something supernatural. An indefinite feeling of anxiety is produced. The heart is impelled with a sentiment of, and aspiration after, immortality and unattainable perfection.

The Greek temple is so simple in its object, so obviously perfect in all its parts, and so easily comprehended, that the understanding is immediately satisfied. Not so with the Gothic, which is much more complicated. It is more the production of feeling than of ratiocination. It exhibits much, hints at a great deal more, and promises every thing. It is like "the glimpses which a prophet hath of heaven in his dreams;" but when attempted to be grasped and analyzed, it shrinks from the coarseness of the touch, and vanishes *like* a dream. The heart is to be impressed with a sentiment borrowed from another world, and all its expressions are to set the heart and imagination to work to catch a glimpse of that other and that better world. This comparison is made with the pure Greek architecture of antiquity. But that is conceding too much to it; for pure Greek architecture in a Christian church is impossible. The very perfection of the Greek temple prevents its being susceptible of the modifications necessary to adapt it for Christian worship. It was produced by a religion whose form as well as spirit were totally different. When copied and modified for moderns use its original character is lost; but no new character is given to it. Its forms become destitute of meaning; it may be guessed to be any thing rather than a church. L. G.

APPLICATION AND INTENT OF THE VARIOUS STYLES OF ARCHITECTURE.[a]

THE Gothic style always fills the eye, and conveys the notion of comprehension and capacity; habitation and converse, and congregational worship beneath its roof, are seen to be its intent. We are invited to enter into the cathedral. The portals expand, and in the long perspective which appears between the pillars of the porch, and ends in the distant choir, the light darts downwards, through the lofty, unseen windows, each marked by its slanting beam of luminous haze, chequering the pillars and the pavement, and forming a translucent gloom. Gothic architecture is an organic whole, bearing within it a living vegetating germ. Its parts and lines are linked and united, they spring and grow out of each other. Its essence is the curve, which, in the physical world, is the token of life or organized matter, just as the straight line indicates death or inorganized matter. It is a combination of arches, whose circles may be infinitely folded, multiplied, and embraced. Hence, the parts of a Gothic building may be expanded indefinitely without destroying its unity. However multiplied and combined, they still retain their relative bearing; however repeated, they never encumber each other. All the arched openings, the tall mullioned windows, the recessed doors, are essential parts; they do not pierce the walls of the structure; on the contrary, they bind them together. The spire may rise aloft, the large and massy walls may lengthen along the ground, but still the building preserves its consistency.

Richness of decoration, colour, and gold, may increase the effect of the Gothic style, but the inventor chiefly relies upon his art and science. Gravitation, which could bring the stone to the ground, is the power which fixes it in the archivolt, and every pinnacle bears witness to the mastery which the architect has gained. The details are sometimes bad. Parts, considered by themselves, may be destitute of beauty, but they are always relevant, and all minor faults are lost in the merits of the entire structure.

Gothic architecture, whatever its primitive elements may have been, was created in the northern parts of Europe; it was there adapted to the wants of a more inclement sky. Its structures were destined for the religious worship of a people amongst whom it was matured. In a Gothic church no idea can possibly arise save that of Christianity and the rites of Christianity. We cannot desecrate it even in thought. From its mode of construction, no convenience which we need ever becomes a blemish, and its character assimilates itself to every emblem or ornament which its use requires.

Many of our contemporaries are desirous of introducing the *pure* Grecian style for the purposes of ecclesiastical and civil architecture. But even their talents cannot naturalize the architecture of ancient Greece in modern England. The Grecian temple will not submit to be transported into our atmosphere. No adaptation can be given which will reconcile it to utility. Plate-glass windows glaring through the inter-columniations, chimneys and chimney-pots arranged above the pediment, are just as appropriate as English nouns and verbs in a Greek hexameter. When the portfolio is opened and the drawing is shewn, these incongruities escape observation in the neat lines and colouring of a geometrical elevation, which can be made to look just as the artist pleases.* But when the scaffold is struck from the real building standing in the open air, then they strike us most forcibly; and we are compelled to acknowledge that its principles are too stubborn and unmanageable. View the Grecian temple as a dwelling and with relation to its inhabitants, and then every part which contributes to comfort or convenience is a grievous sin against architectural fitness; they are rejected by the very essence of the building into which they obtrude themselves.

The objections brought forward against the pure Grecian style do not operate with equal force against that modification of the Roman orders which was invented by the great Italian architects who flourished after the revival of the arts. This has been called an adulterated style. It may be admitted that a new compound has been formed, but the alloy possesses a ductility which is denied to the purer metal. It has been so judiciously matured and naturalized as to acquire great propriety and a degree of picturesque beauty. Wren brought it to the highest state of excellence in this country. It is a bad omen for the progress of architecture, that so many attempts should be made to depreciate the productions of this great artist. The exterior of St. Paul's cathedral resulted from the earnest reflection and labour of a most comprehensive mind. From the pavement up to the cross-crowned globe, there is not a portion which can be removed without destroying the integrity of the composition. It was all present to the mind's eye of the architect before a line was drawn upon the paper. It tells a complete story, neither weakened by after-thoughts nor disfigured by redundancies. If, snail-like, we crawl about the surface, we may stumble upon some petty deformities, an unclassical vase or an inelegant scroll, but no one who has the heart to appreciate this master-piece can be patient when he hears such cavilling criticism.

Architects often fail from the poverty and meagreness of the masses and returns. They compose their buildings out of screens and façades. They seem to forget that a building is to be viewed from more than one point of view, and in various lights. One of the pleasures to be derived from the contemplation of architecture arises from the manner in which the object unfolds and varies as we approach it, or recede from it, or walk round it. We study the play of the perspective and the changes of the shadowing. Wren fully understood the method of giving architectural expression. His lines and masses are always working upon each other. The small low door at the side of each belfry of St. Paul's marks the loftiness of the pile. By coupling the pillars of the double portico, he obtained further breadths of shadow, as well as greater altitude, than he could have done by adhering to the plan of the Grecian portico; and the pyramidical belfries unite in a symmetrical group with the towering dome, based upon the colonnade which circles and retreats below. Q.

[a] Continued from page 491.

A WINDOW THE CAUSE OF A WAR.—When the palace of Trianon was in course of erection, in the reign of Louis XIV., that monarch went to inspect it, accompanied by Louvois, the secretary of war, and the superintendent of the building. He remarked that one of the windows was out of shape, and smaller than the rest. Louvois denied this, and asserted that he could not perceive any difference. The king having had it measured, and finding that he had judged rightly, treated Louvois in a contumelious manner before his whole court. This conduct so incensed the minister, that when he arrived at home he was heard to observe, that he would find better employment for a monarch than that of insulting his favourites; and he appears to have carried his threat into effect, for he insulted the other powers by his insolence and haughtiness, and occasioned the bloody war of 1688.

* If solid models were more in use, the effect of our buildings would be better understood, both by the architect and his employer.

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